

TRUE WORSHIP**NO. 3464****A SERMON****PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JUNE 24, 1915****DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON****AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON****ON THURSDAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 1, 1870**

“Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High: and call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.”

Psalms 50:14-15

EVEN in the Christian church we have great diversities of opinion as to what is the true form of worship. One stoutly cries, “Lo here,” and another as earnestly says, “Lo there!” There are some who think that the more simple and plain the outward worship can be, the better. Others think the more gorgeous and resplendent it can be, the better. Some are for the quietude of the Friends’ meeting house—some are for the stormy music of the cathedral. Some will have it that God is best praised in silence—others that He is best honored with flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and I know not what kinds of music. Is it so difficult, then, to know what kind of worship God will accept?

It is very difficult if it be left to the guesses of men. It is not at all difficult if we turn to the Word of God. There we shall find, I think, great room for diversities of mode, but we shall find ourselves shut up by a consecrated intolerance to a few matters of spirit. We shall there be told what is not essential, but we shall certainly be assured of what is essential to the true worship of God.

And I suppose it will be enough for any one of us who are sincerely anxious to worship God ourselves, if we find out for ourselves by the teaching of God’s Spirit the way to do it, and we shall be content to let others find out the way also for themselves, satisfied if we be approved of God ourselves—for we have very little to do with sitting on the throne of judgment and either condemning or approving others.

Now, on turning to this Psalm we shall find out what worship *is not* acceptable with God, and we shall find out what *is*. And these will make the main points of our sermon this evening.

In reading this Psalm to you, you must all have noticed—

I. WHAT SORT OF OFFERINGS ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE TO GOD.

You noticed with me, I dare say, that first, those are not accepted *in which men place the reliance upon the form itself*, and are contented when they have gone through the form, though their hearts have had no communion with God, and they have brought to the Most High no spiritual sacrifice whatever. Lay it down, then, beyond all question, that formal worship which is not attended with the heart—which is not the worship of the spirit—can never be acceptable with the Most High.

And here we will remind ourselves, too, that *even when the form is actually prescribed of God*, yet without the heart, it is not a worship of God at all in the true sense of language. With what indignation of eloquence does God here speak to the Israelitish people, who imagined that when they had brought their bulls and their goats—when they had kept their holy days, consecrated their priests, presented their offerings, been obedient to the ritual—then that all this was enough.

He puts it to them—He inquires of them whether they can be so foolish as to think that there is anything in sacrifices of bulls and rams that could content the mind of the Most High. If He wanted bullocks and rams, He says, He has enough of them—all living creatures are His—and He has infinite power to make as many more as He would.

Do they fancy that if He wanted bulls and goats, He would come to them for them—that the Creator would crave and turn beggar to His own creatures and ask for bullocks out of *their* houses and goats out

of *their* field? He puts it to them, do they really think that He, the Infinite God, who made the heavens and the earth, the great I AM, actually eats the flesh of bulls and drinks the blood of goats? And yet their idea was that the mere outward sacrifice contented Him.

Was God as gross as that? And what was involved in that? Now I shall put it to you, you who profess to be Christians and yet in your worship, whatever it may be, rest in it. Do you really believe that God is honored by your eating a piece of bread and drinking a few drops of wine? The thousands of creatures that He has in the world eat more bread and drink more wine. Do you really believe that your sitting at a table brings any satisfaction to Him who is in the company of angels, and who has choicer spirits than you are to enter into fellowship with Him?

No, sirs, if you rest in the outward form, what you do can bring no amount of entertainment to Him. He might say to those priests who think that they offer unto God a sacrifice in the Mass, “Do I eat bread that is made by the baker, leavened or unleavened? Do you think that I drink wine expressed from the grape?” Fancy you, you that find satisfaction in these things—oh! fools, and slow of heart—that the infinite JEHOVAH takes any delight in these matters?

And if you come to baptism as God Himself commands it—if you trust in that, might He not say to you, “Do you think that I am pleased with water, when the rivers, the lakes, the seas, and the deeps that lie beneath are all My own? Does that immersion in water bring any satisfaction to Me, in itself considered? What can there be in it that can delight My infinite mind or satisfy My soul?”

If we rest in any outward form, though God prescribes it, we must have a very gross and carnal idea of God indeed, if we conceive that He is served or glorified thereby. It cannot be so. If men were not idiotic, they would shake off from themselves all idea of sacramental efficacy and everything that is akin to it. They would see that what God wants is the heart, the soul, the love, the trust, the confidence of rational, intelligent beings—not the going through of certain forms.

The forms are useful enough when they teach us the truth of which they are the emblems. The forms are precious and as ordained of God, to be reverently used by those who can see what they mean, and who are helped by the emblem to see the inner meaning, but by none besides. The mere outward thing is but the shell, the husk—useless, unless there be within it the living kernel, the embryo which the shell protects. The mere form of outward worship is just nothing—it is not acceptable with God.

Now if this be true—and we know it is—of even ordinances ordained of God, *how much more must it be true of ceremonies that are not of God’s ordaining?* I am not about to judge, but I will say of all ceremonies and absence of ceremony, if there be no divine prescription, we feel certain that there cannot be a divine acceptance. And even if that could be supposed, yet if the heart were not there, and there were reliance in these outward things of man’s devising, it were utter folly to suppose that God accepts them.

For instance, there are certain people who think that God is glorified by banners, by processions, by acolytes, by persons in white, in blue, in scarlet—(I know not what colors)—by golden crucifixes, or brass, or ivory—by very sweet music, by painting, by incense. Now what an idea they must have of God! What a thought they must have of Him!

I remember standing on Monte Cenis one afternoon on a very broiling summer’s day, in a cool place where I could look all over the wide plains of Italy and see the blue sky—such a blue as we never see, and the innumerable flowers, and all the land fair as a dream—and then I looked to my right and there stood a shrine—a shrine to which there came a worshipper.

There was a doll. They called it “the Blessed Virgin.” It was adorned with all sorts of trinkets—just such things as I have seen sold at a country fair for children. It had little sprigs of faded artificial flowers—little bits of paint. And I said to myself, “The God that made this glorious landscape in which everything is true and real—do they fancy that He is honored by this kind of thing—these baubles? What an idea they must have of God.”

Sirs, if He wanted banners, He would deck His escutcheon with the stars. If He wanted incense, ten thousand thousand flowers would shed their sweet perfume upon the air. If He wants music, the wind

shall sound it, the woods shall clap their hands, and every forest tree shall give out its note, and angelic harpers standing on the glassy sea shall give such music as your ears and mine have never conceived.

If He wants an alb, behold the snow! If He wants your many-colored raiments, see how He decks the meadows with flowers and strews with both His hands rainbow hues on every side. If He wanted garments, He would bind the sky's azure round Him with a belt of rainbows and come forth in His glory.

But your dolls and your boys and men, and all their millinery! Sirs, do you know what you are at? Have you got souls? If you worshipped a calf, calves, like you, might well worship him in such in style, but the great I AM, that builded heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands, that is to say, in these buildings—and He is not worshipped by such trumpery as this. All this, of men's inventing, can never be acceptable to the Most High. Common sense tells us so—much more the revelation of God.

But, mark you, my censure does not count alone against them. Suppose a man should say, "Well, I am far enough from that. On the morning of the first day of the week I resort to a meeting house—whitewashed, a few forms, a raised desk at the end of it—and I sit down there. I have not any minister—nobody to speak, unless he believes the Spirit moves him. We all sit still—many times sit still the whole morning. *We worship God.*"

Do you believe you have? If your heart was there—if your soul was there—I am the last man to complain of the absence of form. I love your simplicity, I admire it. But if you trust it, I believe *your simplicity will as certainly ruin you as the gorgeousness that goes to the opposite extreme*, for if there be any reliance in that sitting still—if there be any reliance in that waiting—(take our own case) if there be any reliance in your coming up to these pews and listening to me—do you think you have served God merely by coming here to sing hymns, and cover your faces during prayer, and so on? I tell you, you have not worshipped God.

You are mistaken if you suppose the mere act counts for anything. You know not what you think—you know not what your mind is drifting to. It is the heart that gets to God—it is the eye that pours out penitential tears—it is the soul that loves and blesses and praises—this is the sacrifice. But all the outward, whether God Himself ordained it, or man devised it—or whether it is a matter of mere convenience—it cannot be received by the Most High.

So let me add, beloved friends, a matter which may touch some of you. *The mere repetition of holy words can never be acceptable sacrifices to God.* There are some who from their childhood have been taught to say a form of prayer. I shall neither commend nor censure, but I will say this—you may repeat that form of prayer for twenty, forty, fifty years, and yet never have prayed a single word in all your life.

I am not judging the words. They may be the best you could possibly put together. They may be the words of inspiration, but the mere saying of words is not prayer, neither does God receive it as such. You might just as well say the Lord's Prayer backwards as forwards for the matter of its acceptance with God, except you say it with your heart.

I believe some people fancy that the reading of prayers in the family, and especially that the reading of prayers at the bedside of the sick, has a kind of charm—that it somehow or other has a mysterious influence, helps to prepare men for life or for death. Believe me, no grosser error could exist. When the soul talks with God, it matters not what language it uses. If it finds a convenient form and it uses it with its heart, let it use it if so it will. But if, on the other hand, the words come bubbling up and come never so strangely and irregularly, yet if the heart speaks, God accepts the prayer—and that is worship.

So, too, in singing. If we have the sweetest hymn that ever was written—yea, though it were an inspired hymn, and if we sang it to the noblest tune that ever composer wrote, yet we do not praise God by the mere repetition of the words and the production of those sounds. Ah! no—the whole of it lies in the soul after all.

"God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him." Let there be good music, by all means, and noble words, for these are congruous to noble thoughts—but oh! let the thoughts be there. Let the song be there. Let the flames of

love burn on the altar of the heart. Be the outward expression what it may, let the praise be winged by the ardent affections of the soul—otherwise far from you be the thought that you have worshipped God when you have used solemn words with thoughtless hearts.

Does not this touch some of you? You have never prayed in all your lives. You have said a prayer, but never talked with God. You have been to the house of God, perhaps, from your infancy, but never worshipped God. Though oftentimes the preacher said, “Let us worship God,” yet you have never done so.

O sirs, what! All these formalities, all these routines, all these outward forms, and yet no heart, no soul?—nothing acceptable with God? Alas! for you! and will you go on so forever? You will, so long as you rest contented with the outward. I do pray that God may put in you a sacred discontent with the merely outward worship, and make you long and cry that you may offer unto Him the sacrifice of a broken and a contrite heart through Jesus Christ the Savior, by the power of the eternal Spirit—for that will the Lord accept.

Thus I have mentioned one form of sacrifice that God does not accept, namely, that of formalists. Now this Psalm shows us that—

II. THERE ARE OTHER SACRIFICES WHICH GOD REJECTS, namely, *those offered by persons who continue their wicked lives.*

Now some will preach and yet live in an ungodly manner. Some can lead prayers in the prayer meeting and yet can lie and thieve. There be those that, for a pretense, make long prayers. Their minds are occupied upon the widow’s house, and how they shall devour it, while their lips are uttering consecrated words.

Now observe *no man’s praying is accepted with God who is a hater of instruction*. Turn to the seventeenth verse of the Psalm—“Seeing thou hatest instruction, and casteth my words behind thy back.” Let me look a man in the face who never reads the Bible—who does not want to know what is in it—who has no care about what God’s Word is—I see there a man that cannot worship God.

If he says, “Oh! I am sincere in my own way”—sir, your “own way”—but that way is sure to be the way of rebellion. A servant does not have his own way, but his master’s way. You are not a servant of God while you think that your will and your fancy are to settle what God would have you do. “To the law and to the testimony.”

Every devout mind should say, “I will search and see what God would have me do.” What does He say to me? Does He tell me that I am by nature lost and ruined? Lord, help me to feel it! Does He tell me that only by faith in a crucified Savior can I be saved? Lord, work that faith in me! Does He tell me that they who are justified must also be sanctified and made pure in life? Lord, sanctify me by Your Spirit and work in me purity of life!

The really accepted man desires to know the divine will, and to that man there is not one part of Scripture that he would wish not to know, nor one part of God’s teaching that he would wish to be ignorant of. The Lord does not expect you, beloved, while you are in this world at any rate to know everything, but He does expect that you who call yourselves His people should also be as little children, who are quite willing to learn.

Oh! it is an ill sign with us when there are some chapters that we would like to see pasted over—when there are some passages of Scripture that grate on our ears—when we do not want to be too wise in what is written—do not want to know too well what the Lord’s will is. If you shut your ear to God’s instruction willfully and will not listen to His will, neither will He listen to your prayer, nor can you expect that your sacrifice will be received by the Most High.

Such things are not acceptable, and yet—and yet—how large a proportion of Christendom has never recognized the duty of learning the will of God from God’s own Spirit! They take it from their party leaders—one borrows from this body of divinity, another from his Prayer Book. One borrows from his parents and must be what his father was—and another borrows from his friend, or thinks that the national church must necessarily be the right one.

But the genuine spirit says, “Lord, I would have that which is Your mind—not mine, nor man’s. Oh! teach You me.” And though he judges not others, he desires always to be judged of God Himself—to stand before the Most High and say, “Search me, O God, and try me, and know my way, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the right way everlasting.”

The Psalm goes on to say that *God does not accept the sacrifices of dishonest men*. “When thou sawest the thief, thou consentedst with him.” When a man’s common trade is dishonesty—when frequently he excuses himself, as some servants do, in little pilferings—as some masters do in false markings of their goods—when the man knows he is not walking uprightly before his fellow men, he comes to the altar of God and brings a sacrifice which he pollutes with every touch of his hand.

No, sir! No. Say not that you have fellowship with God when your fellowship is with a thief. Think you to have God on one side, and the thief on the other? Surely you know not who He is. If we are not perfect, yet at least let us be sincere. And if there be sins into which we fall through inadvertence and surprise, yet at least uprightness before our fellow men is one thing that must not be lacking—cannot be lacking in a gracious soul—in a true child of God whom God accepts.

So next, *the sin of impurity prevents our worshipping God*. You come and say, “Lord, have mercy upon us! Christ have mercy upon us!” Or you say, “We praise You, O God. We acknowledge You to be the Lord.” Or you stand up here and sing, “All hail the power of Jesu’s name,” and you have come from lascivious talking—perhaps from worse than talking.

You have even now upon your mind some scheme of what is called “pleasure,” and you think that “life” means what in this assembly and in the assembly of God’s people it were best not to mention, for you count it no shame to do what believers count it shame even to think of. Polluted hands! Polluted hands! How can they be lifted up before God? Use what forms you may, your praises are an abomination. Your prayers, while you continue as you are, are a loathing and a stench in the nostrils of God. Turn ye. Repent ye. Seek washing in the Savior’s blood—and then you may offer acceptable praises, but not till then.

The Psalmist goes on to say that *so it is with slanderers*. Slanderers cannot be accepted with God—those (and oh! how many these are) who count it sport to ruin other people’s characters—who seem to take a joy and a delight in finding fault with the people of God. How can you expect that God will bless you when you are cursing your fellow men. And while your mouth is full of bitterness, how can it also be full of praise?

Now these are not things that will cheer and comfort the people of God. I trust in my own ministry it is a main point to comfort God’s people, but the axe also must be laid to the root of the tree. And let it be known to all who come into these courts, that if they come here with defilement in their spirits and with lust or unrighteousness in their daily practice, and love to have it so, from this pulpit they shall find no apologies and gather no comfort, and from God’s Word, too, they shall have denunciation, but not consolation. They shall have threatening and judgment, but not the promised blessing.

Now we must have a few minutes on the next part of our subject, on which I hope to enlarge on another occasion, which is—

III. WHAT SACRIFICES ARE ACCEPTABLE WITH GOD?

The text tells us, first, *thanksgiving*. “Offer unto God thanksgiving.” Let us come and worship then, brethren—let us come and worship. We were lost, but Jesus came to seek the lost. Blessed be His name. We were foul and filthy, but His mercy brought us to the fountain filled with blood. “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive honor, and glory, and majesty, and power, and dominion, and might.”

Since that very day in which He washed us, He has given us all things richly in His covenant. “He maketh us to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth us beside the still waters.” “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.”

Now if that be your spirit—if you can even keep up that spirit when the husband sickens, when the child dies, when the property melts away—and you can say, “The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away: blessed be the name of the LORD”—what if there be no hymn from your lips, if there be no

bull on the altar, yet these are the calves of your lips—the offering of your heart—and they are a sacrifice of a sweet smell if they are presented through Jesus Christ, the great atoning High Priest.

This is a sacrifice that God accepts, and I dare say it is often offered to Him in an attic—often presented to Him in a cellar—often, I hope, by you when your hands are grimy at your work and perhaps even when your cheeks are scalding with tears you can yet say, “I am His child. I have innumerable mercies. When He smites me, yet it is in tenderness. Glory be to His name! Blessed be His name!”

That is the sacrifice for a spiritual God. That is spiritual worship. Have you ever offered it, dear hearer, or have you been living on God’s favor and yet never thanked Him? Have you had your life preserved and your daily food constantly given, and yet have you never blessed God for it? Oh! then you have never worshipped Him. I do not care though you are a good singer—although you put on a vestment, or whatever else you have done—if you have not thanked Him from your soul, devoutly and intensely, you know not what the worship of JEHOVAH is.

Next the text tells us that *performance of our vows is worship*. “Pay thy vows unto the Most High.” Now I shall interpret that not after the Jewish form, but adapt it to our own. You, beloved, profess to be a Christian. Live as a Christian. Say, “The vows of the Lord are upon me. How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God? I am a servant of Jesus. I am not my own—I am bought with a price. What can I do to praise Him today? How can I win another soul for Him who bought me with His precious blood? I declared myself, when I joined His church, to be one of His, and therefore, a cross-bearer. Let me take up my cross today, whatever it is, though I may be ridiculed, separated, and laughed at. Let me do it—bear it cheerfully for His truth, and let me say—

*‘If on my face, for Thy dear name,
Shame and reproach shall be;
I’ll hail reproach, and welcome shame,
If Thou’lt remember me.’*

“Let me do everything as in His sight. I was in outward form buried in baptism—I profess then to be dead to the world. Oh! let me try to be so! Let not its pleasures cheat me. Let not its gains enchant me. I profess even to be risen with Christ. Oh! God, help me to lead a risen life—the life of one who is risen from the dead with Jesus Christ and quickened with His spirit.”

Now if that be your thought, that is true worship, that is real sacrifice to the Most High—when a soul desires to walk before the Lord in conformity with its vows and gracious obligations, not with a view of merit—for it lays all its hope upon Jesus and finds all its merit there, but simply cries, “I am His, and I wish to live as one that bears a blood-bought name.”

We are told, too, in the text—and that is a very sweet part of it—(I wish I had an hour or two to talk of it)—that *prayer in time of trouble is also a very sweet form of worship*. Men are looking for rubrics, and they are contending whether the rubric is “so-and-so according to the use of Sarum.” Now here is a rubric according to the use of the whole church of God bought with Jesu’s blood—“Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.”

You are in great distress of mind—now you have an opportunity of worshipping God. Trust Him with your distress. Call to Him as a child calls to its mother. Show how you honor Him—how you love Him—how you trust Him. You shall honor Him even in that—but when you get the answer to your prayer, which will be a sure proof that God has accepted your offering—then you will honor Him again a second time by devoutly thanking Him that He has heard your prayer.

O sinner, this is a way in which you can worship God. Does your sin lie heavy upon your conscience? Call upon God in the day of trouble, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” That is true worship. Have you brought yourself to poverty for your sin? Say, “Lord, help me.” That is prayer. Worship, then, can never go up from all the pealing organs in the world if men’s hearts go not therewith.

Are you a Christian just now under a cloud? Have you lost the light of Jesu's face? Call upon Him now in the day of trouble. Believe that He will appear for you. Say, "I shall praise Him. His countenance is my aid," and you will be bringing better sacrifice than if you brought he-goats, and bullocks, and rams. This is what the Lord loves—the trust, the child-like confidence, the loving seeking after sympathy which is in His children's hearts. Oh! bring Him this!

Then he adds—if you will turn to the last part of the Psalm, which I must incorporate in the text—"Whoso offereth praise glorifieth him." *True praise glorifies God*. I must confess that I do not particularly like to hear voices that jar in the singing, but I should not like to stop one voice, certainly not if it stopped one heart. I think it is said of Mr. Rowland Hill, that an old lady once sat upon his pulpit stairs who sang so very bad a voice that the good gentleman really could not feel that he could worship while he heard her voice in his ear—and he said, "Do be quiet, my good soul."

She answered, "I sing from my heart, Mr. Hill." "Sing away!" said he, "and I beg your pardon. I will not stop you." And I think I would beg the pardon of the most cracked voice I ever heard if it is really accompanied with a real loving, grateful heart. God gets some of His richest praise amidst dying groans and He gets delightful music from His people's triumphant cries.

"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" To praise God—to sing an *excelsis in extremis*—to give Him the highest praise when we are in the deepest waters—this is acceptable with Him! The best worship comes from the Christian that is most tried—at least in this case.

When the soul is most bowed down with trouble, if he can say, "I will praise Him: I will praise Him in the fire: I will praise Him in the jaws of death itself"—ah! these are sacrifices better than hecatombs of bulls, and better than the blood of fed beasts. Not your architecture, not your music, not your costumes, not your array, not your ordinations or your forms, but your hearts prostrate, your souls with veiled faces, worshipping the mysterious, the unseen, but everywhere present great I AM—this is worship. Through Jesus Christ, it is accepted. It is of the Spirit's own creation. It only comes from truly spiritual, regenerate men, and wherever it comes, it reaches the Majesty on high, and God smiles and accepts it.

Now, brethren, I send you home with this reflection. Some of you have never worshipped God. Then think of that, and God help you to begin! Others of us who have worshipped Him ought to consider how large a proportion of our worship is good for nothing. Oh! how often you come and hear now on Thursday night! Why, have not you built a ship in the pew sometimes—mended a plow—darned your husband's stockings—seen to the sick child—done all sorts of things, when you should be worshipping God?

Now these distracting thoughts mar worship, and I do pray God that you as a people may never get to think that coming here is of any use if you do not bring your hearts with you. Thomas Manton said that if we sent on the Sabbath a man stuffed with straw to sit in our pews for us, and thought that was worshipping God, it would be very absurd, but not one whit more than when we bring ourselves stuffed with evil thoughts or dead, cold thoughts that cannot rise to God.

I cannot always get to God, I know, but I at least hope I may groan until I do. Oh! it does seem an awful thought that some of us may have no more feelings than the pews we sit on—no more worship of God than those iron columns and those lamps. Oh! may you never be that sort of slumbering congregation with whom it is all form!

We have read a strange poem of one who has pictured a ship manned by all dead men. Dead men pulled the sails. A dead man steered and a skeleton eye kept a look-out. I am afraid there are congregations like that—where all is dead and all is form. Oh! may it not be so with you or me, but may we all realize, through Jesus Christ, who stands at the throne, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, "have fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ," and that evermore to God's glory! Amen.

I speak on this theme but very feebly, but I do feel it from my very heart. I do pray that we may all be accepted worshippers because the heart is found in us. It was always a bad sign—by the Roman augurs it was pretended to be the worst sign—when they found no heart in the victim. It is a dreadful sign when in all our worship there is no heart. God forbid that it may be so! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALM 50:1-10

A Psalm of Asaph

Whether this means that Asaph wrote it, or that it was committed to him to sing, we do not know. Certainly Asaph did write some Psalms. There are twelve ascribed to him in the book of Psalms. He wrote some and it is equally certain that some others were dedicated to him. He had the leadership of the orchestra, who sang the Psalm in the temple.

This is a very marvelous Psalm. If we only consider the poetry of it, it is one of the chief of the Psalms, but its matter is very deep—august. It should be read with great reverence of spirit. The Psalm begins with a prologue in which the scene is introduced. God is represented as coming forth out of Zion to judge those who profess to be His people—to discern between the precious and the vile—to separate between mere professors and pretenders. The first six verses represent God as coming.

Verse 1. *The mighty God, even the LORD, hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof.*

The Hebrew has it, “El Elohim, JEHOVAH hath spoken”—three names of God—great and mysterious—the strong God, the only God, the self-existent God. He speaks—calls upon the whole earth from the east to the west to listen to His voice.

2. *Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined*

There He dwelt. Now in this scene He is represented as shining forth from it. As he had described the earth as being lighted by the sun from the east to the west, so now God Himself, who at first speaks and demands a hearing, now shines forth with beams of glory which altogether eclipse the brightness of the sun. “Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined.”

3. *Our God shall come, and shall not keep silent: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.*

The voice was heard saying that God would come and then the beams of glory which warned men that He was coming—and here His people stand attentive, expecting Him to come. “They expect Him to speak.” Fire and rushing wind are usually used in Scripture as attendants of the throne of God—fire representing justice in action, and the tempest representing His power when it is displayed. Think of God’s coming thus. The poet here pictures it, but it will be so in very deed. “The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance upon those that know not God.” He will even come after this manner, “for our God is a consuming fire.”

4. *He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people.*

Do you catch the thought? There comes the great Judge with the fire burning before Him. He rides upon a cherub—yea, rides upon the wings of the wind, and then He calls heaven, with all the angels and glorified spirits—and He calls to earth, with all its inhabitants, to stand and witness what He does while He judges His people.

5. *Gather my saints together unto me: those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.*

God has a separated and chosen people. It will be a part of the proceedings at the last great day to gather these together unto God. There will be a day when He will make up His jewels—a time when He will gather His wheat into His garner. And as this Psalm stands, this is a larger gathering. It refers to a

picture of all professing saints being brought before the throne of God—true saints that made a covenant with God by sacrifice.

They see Jesus Christ, who ratifies the covenant of grace by blood, and they have laid their hands on Christ, and the covenant made between them and God. But there were others in the Psalmist's day who had offered sacrifice and pretended to have made a covenant with God—and there are their representatives in these days. They are now to be gathered before the throne of judgment, for God has come to judge them.

6. *And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself. Selah.*

The very heavens, as they look down upon the august assize where God Himself, not by deputy, but in the person of His dear Son, shall sit and judge—the heavens shall declare His righteousness. Now I doubt not the heavens often wonder how it is that God permits the ungodly to be mixed with the righteous in His church. But ah! when the fan shall be in His hand and He shall thoroughly purge His floor—when He shall lay justice to the line and righteousness to the plummet—the angels shall wonder at the exactness and accuracy of the divine judgment. “Selah.” Pause, rest, consider, admire, adore, humble yourself, pray. It is good to have a pause when such a scene as this is before us.

Now from the fifth verse down to the fifteenth verse you have God's dealing with His people. The Judge is sitting on the throne. He begins to speak thus—

7. *Hear, O my people, and I will speak: O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God.*

It is with His nominal people, the Jews. It is with His visible church, God is now dealing. He Himself has seen the ways of His professing people—He need not, therefore, call any witnesses. He who cannot err will testify against us. And He declares Himself here not only as God, but under that name, “thy God.” It was thus the law began. “I am the LORD thy God that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage.” It is thus the judgment and rebuke begin—“I am God, even thy God.”

8. *I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me.*

He is going to deal with weightier matters than that. Whether they have, or have not, offered abundant sacrifices, that is not the thing which God looks at. “I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices. Nay, I have done with thy sacrifices.”

9. *I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds.*

“Do you think that these things in themselves are of any value to Me, O you formalists? I will not even take them.”

10. *For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.*

Though men call them theirs, yet they are thy God's.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.